

Ralph J. Bunch Legacy: Minority Officers

AMBASSADOR CHARLES J. NELSON

Interviewed by: Celestine Tutt

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Q: This is an oral history interview with Ambassador Charles J. Nelson, an educator, government official and diplomat. Until July 1981, he was an associate professor at Howard University's School of Human Ecology in Washington, DC where he specialized in teaching, student counseling and advisement, thesis direction, administration, curriculum and course development, university committees, and proposal writing. He was also initiator and program coordinator for the Hubert Humphrey Fellowship Program. Ambassador Nelson is a former United States Ambassador to the Republic of Botswana, the Kingdom of Swaziland and the Kingdom of Lesotho, having served thus from 1971 to 1974. He has also had a number of other major diplomatic assignments with the Department of State, the Agency for International Development, International Cooperation Administration, the Mutual Security Agency, and he has been an associate director of the Peace Corps. This interview is being sponsored by the Phelps-Stokes Fund as part of an oral history project on Black Chiefs of Mission. The interview is the first in a series. It is being held Friday, October 30, 1981 in Washington, DC. Celestine Tutt, interviewer.

Ambassador Nelson, what were the events which led to your entry into the diplomatic service?

NELSON: If we're talking about my involvement in the Foreign Service, I started in 1952 with the Mutual Security Program in the Philippines. In terms of direct employment with the Department of State as an Ambassador, that began in 1971 at which time I was serving as Director of the Economic Mission to Tanzania. It was very much a surprise to me that a person came out from Washington to a meeting that I was attending in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia and indicated that I was under consideration and I was going to be appointed, or recommended for appointment, as Ambassador to Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland. At the time I was under consideration by the Economic Assistance Program to return to Tanzania for a second tour as head of the Economic Mission there, so all I can say is that it was a surprise to me. I think that the person who possibly precipitated this event was the then administrator of the Agency, Dr. John Hannah, who was formerly president of Michigan State University. My assumption is that on the basis of my work with the AID Agency or the Economic Assistance Program, that a recommendation did flow from the Agency to the Department of State in the sense that I might serve as an ambassador. On occasion, people are taken from the Economic Assistance Program for this particular purpose.

Q: What were your first impressions of the new spots, new posts?

NELSON: Botswana?. I'd never been to southern Africa previously, and, of course, to reach Botswana we had to go through South Africa. South Africa we've all read and heard about. That was the beginning of some understanding of the situation or the geographical context and political context within which Botswana finds itself. Botswana is a large country ... large in area, small in population. I had read about Seretse Khama, who was then the president of Botswana.

As I was saying, to me it was significant in terms of the geographic context in which Botswana finds itself. I guess my questions were about such things ... where are you going to live, the kinds of staff do I have to work with, how you will be received. I was the first American ambassador to these countries. There had been representation there previously, but at the Consul General level. Therefore, in a sense, it was a kind of challenge to see how I could represent my country vis-a-vis Botswana and how in a sense I could be supportive of Botswana in terms of its interests and its concerns, and to relate the United States positively to them. With my background in economic assistance work, one of my main concerns was seeing how, or determining how, the United States could, through its representation there, particularly the AID Program, how it could reinforce and support the development activity which was taking place in Botswana.

As a part of my functioning in Botswana I also carried a second title of Economic Coordinator for the area, and this, I think, was a particular focus of mine, because to me, Botswana has tremendous potential and significant resources, and it had a government and leadership that was, in my view, dedicated to the advancement of the country and of its people. And in that area, it was also, I think, significant to see it was a government which, in a real sense, was non-racial. In other words, the government was populated by Botswanans of European extraction as well as African extraction, and when you place that in juxtaposition to South Africa, it takes on some additional significance.

I think it was also obvious there that Botswana at that time had Rhodesia to its north, Namibia, Angola and it had ferry connection across the Zambezi, I guess it was, to Zambia. Its main outlet, however, was through South Africa in terms of trade, transportation and all the rest, and the railroad, which was the main vehicle for transportation of goods and commerce, etc. was the new Rhodesian Railway. So in a sense, this gives you, or should give someone, some appreciation of where Botswana found itself and the context within which it was attempting to give real meaning to its independence at the time I was there. I think this probably still exists today. Botswana is a member of the Customs Union of which South Africa was a participant, and at that time also, although this has changed, the currency in Botswana was the South African rand.

So in sum, I guess you can say that here I was traveling through South Africa to reach the capital of Botswana, becoming quite aware of where Botswana found itself in many contexts, and being aware also that this was a country which had and has significant resources, but at the same time, as it attempted to give meaning to its independence, certainly had many constraints. And these constraints were not only internally in terms of human resources and the development of the human resources to provide leadership and administration and management for that country, but the constraints of the geographical context in which it found itself. Because in reality, Botswana in Africa has a very tenuous physical, not quite a relationship - what I am thinking about here is that in terms of black Africa, it was in a sense more distant, but in terms of southern Africa - South Africa in a kind of way is having significant control vis-a-vis Botswana and Botswana's access to the world. I guess the term is access, because its access to black Africa was in a sense a ferry across the Zambezi to Zambia. And this has a meaningful effect on the means of access which Botswana had and still has, of course.

Q: Speaking of that ... more about that geographic context, would you say the same really applies to Lesotho and Swaziland?

NELSON: Lesotho at that time was, and still is, of course, totally surrounded by South Africa, although one of the so-called independent nations within South Africa now is on its border, one of the Bantustans, in other words. Swaziland is in a somewhat similar situation but it has ready access, or linkage with Mozambique, so in a sense, Swaziland could go both ways: through the Republic or through Mozambique. Lesotho does not have that advantage. And the interesting thing is that if I were to fly from Botswana to Lesotho or fly to Swaziland, in each instance if I was using private means or even the Air Attaché's 1/2 aircraft which was stationed in South Africa, we had to get overflight permission from the Republic of South Africa in order to reach Lesotho or to reach Swaziland.

Q: You had to request that every time you had to go from Botswana?

NELSON: Clearance, yes.

Q: Clearance ... to go to your other two posts?

NELSON: Right. If I went by land, by car, which I did quite often, of course you'd have to go through the border post at one, when you crossed into South Africa from Botswana, or when you crossed from South Africa into Lesotho you'd go through one border post of the South African Government, the border post of the Botswanan Government, as well as the border post of the Lesotho Government, or the Swazi Government, or whatever the case might be. And this is again another manifestation of where these three countries, and how these three countries, in a sense, were situated. And, of course, we all know their policies as they were against the policies of South Africa.

Q: Talk more about the differences, please, in the policies.

NELSON: The difference between South Africa and the policies of South Africa and the three countries? Well, I think the main difference really is that these were so-called functioning, multiracial democracies - that particularly applies to Botswana - open societies with a franchise extended and participation in government extended to all the people, and, of course, this is directly contrary to the Republic. So I think that's the main distinction I would draw. It is also true that Lesotho had very meager resources; its primary resources, its manpower or human power. Swaziland is more favorably endowed and, of course, Botswana has tremendous endowments, but against South Africa, which has very, very significant resources, which has a significant military establishment, and all the rest, the three countries were at a distinct disadvantage and certainly could not, in any way, be said to have the power base which, in any way, could contend with that of South Africa. Therefore, in their attempts to bring a real sense of viability to their being, very adroit, skillful and in a sense, dedicated leadership was required, or is required. And there is one other factor and that is that, for example, in the case of Lesotho, its primary resource was the repatriation of wages from the employment of its people in South Africa in the mines and other activities, but primarily in the mines. And that makes a country such as Lesotho very vulnerable. Swaziland also had workers in South Africa as well as Botswana, but Botswana and Swaziland were not dependent upon the export of manpower to South Africa for their livelihood. In a sense, this was an imperative for Lesotho.

Q: Could you describe United States presence in Botswana prior to your becoming Ambassador?

NELSON: In Botswana we had an AID mission; correction, we had AID mission representation. When I say AID mission I mean the Economic Assistance Program had personnel in Botswana. We had, in those days, a USIS library, and so forth, although we did not have American USIS personnel. And there was a small Embassy staff headed by a consular officer. This situation, more or less, remained the same during my tenure in Botswana, although there were significant increases in terms of the personnel of the Economic Assistance Program, both contractual personnel and direct employees of the U.S. Government. The USIS person was stationed in Lesotho and did visit Botswana and Swaziland, as the case may be. The headquarters of the AID program was in Swaziland, but the head of the AID program would visit Botswana or Lesotho, again as the case may be. In other words, my main place of residence was Botswana. We had embassies in the other two countries headed by chargés¹/₂s, and when I would visit them, of course, I would become responsible for the Embassy. The AID director, the director of the Economic Assistance Program was in Swaziland, the head of the USIS program was in Lesotho. In a sense what it was was a divvying up of the heads of various agencies between the various countries. Now in each of the countries we did have a Peace Corps director and, of course, a Peace Corps staff and Peace Corps volunteers. They did not have one Peace Corps director for the three countries, but they had a director for each country. That situation has changed now, and each of the countries stands on its own feet in terms of U.S. representation, because there is a USIS person, an ambassador, and an AID director in each of the three countries. I was told from time to time when I tried to reinforce, in a sense, the representation of the other branches of U.S. Government, that this could not be done, so I served the three countries because, in a sense, at that time there was some concern about the size of U.S. representation abroad; therefore, one USIS person serving three countries, one ambassador serving three countries, and so on ... needless to say, that changed. I was there for three years - a little over three years - and that changed almost immediately after I left.

Q: Exactly how did that change?

NELSON: It changed in the sense that you ... it wasn't immediately after I left. I think the third ambassador, or the third appointment to Botswana served only Botswana. And I think this, in a sense, to me is better because you can devote your full attention and time to the country of your assigned responsibility; trying to serve three countries is not easy in terms of time-sharing and all the rest of it.

Q: I'm sure. How did you allocate your time to those three countries?

NELSON: Well, I spent most of my time in Botswana.

Q: It was by far the larger of the three.

NELSON: Larger in size. But Lesotho is smallest in size but largest in population. I spent most of my time in Botswana; I would say six to eight months out of the year were spent in Botswana, and the rest was spent in the other two countries. Always, I was always in the countries for their national day, and I did go at particular junctures where we felt that something was critical or whatever. But it was somewhat difficult, and participating in this way, you did not come to know the people, the government officials, and just in a plain sense, the country, as well as the U.S. programs, as well as you would like. In fact, in a sense, you were dipping in and dipping out, although we exchanged cables and all the rest of it; cables, different correspondence, telephone calls, or whatever the case might be, are not a substitute for face to face actual physical presence in a particular country or place.

Q: How would you describe United States policy towards Botswana or towards any of those countries?

NELSON: Well, let's take Botswana. I think that you can't ... it's difficult to talk about ... and I wasn't assigned to South Africa ... in southern Africa, and when I say southern Africa I think we have to talk about the Republic, talk about Botswana, talk about Lesotho, Swaziland, Angola, Mozambique, Rhodesia and so forth and so on. And you look at that in terms of 1971. Here you are in an independent black-ruled country within southern Africa, Botswana, a country which, I think, is truly a friend of the United States. There was a functioning multiparty democracy, which makes it, in a sense, unique, not only in southern Africa, but unique in terms of Africa because there just aren't too many functioning "multi-party democracies" in Africa. And, therefore, you decide that U.S. representation, policy representation in a country such as Botswana should be not only significant in solely Botswanan terms, but also should be significant within the context of southern Africa and the kind of government that it represented in that area, as well as Africa at large, as well as the world. And I would say that we had a policy which ... I would say the policy of the United States Government to Botswana was supportive and it accorded with the interest of the United States because of what we were there for in terms of furthering U.S. interest. And in a sense accorded with the interests of Botswana as we look at Botswana in isolation, but Botswana doesn't exist in isolation, and therefore you have the kind of anomalies or paradoxes, or however you might wish to say it, as to at that time the embargo of Rhodesia and then you have the Byrd Amendment ... you have to go and explain that and so forth and so on ... the United States vis-a-vis Rhodesia....

Q: Would you explain that amendment, please?

NELSON: Well, you know, this was in terms of strategic minerals and stockpiles in the United States. We at one time were not purchasing Rhodesian resources. We had an embargo against Rhodesia ... and it was a leaky embargo, but officially this was the case. But then there was an amendment proposed, as I remember, by Byrd, which would, in a sense, condone trade ... officially condone trade between the United States and Rhodesia. You know there was an attempt there to assess the further independence process, to isolate Rhodesia.

There was also our relationship, or our position vis-a-vis Angola. Angola borders on Botswana and one of its main tributary rivers rises in Angola. And then there was, of course, Namibia, which is still an issue. And there was South Africa and its apartheid and other policies, which are still an issue. And our presence and representation in Botswana, while supportive of Botswana in terms of its national interest, I guess you'd say, also has to be looked at (what am I trying to say here?) within the context of where Botswana is and what Botswana, in a sense, was trying to do. As Botswana as an African nation, as a member of the Organization of African States, and so on vis-a-vis these particular, at that time, and some still existing today, difficult situations. In other words, meaningful independence in Rhodesia with participation by all of its people, the Angola situation, the Namibian situation, and, of course, the situation in South Africa. I don't know whether that's clear enough. But what I'm trying to say, I guess, is that if Botswana existed alone, which of course it does not do, our relationship to it and our policy toward it were proper and from a development standpoint, supportive. But as I said, Botswana does not exist in isolation. It is a part of Africa; it is a part of southern Africa, more immediate, and they certainly ... let's say that the U.S. policies, whatever they may have been, did not coincide with the ideas of how the Botswanans thought we should be exercising our presence or influence in the area. I imagine that still reigns true today.

Q: In terms of U.S. policy towards Swaziland and Lesotho, would you say that basically the same applied, or are there differences?

NELSON: I mean basically the same applies. Significant differences are not apparent, or were not apparent at that time. All three of the countries are different, very different, in their governments, people and everything else. I'm certain ... not certain, no, but ... and maybe I'm influenced by where I lived and so on ... but it's much easier, let us say, to have a positive base in a context where you feel that the country has potential, has a meaningful future, and where the leadership, the officials, etc. are dedicated to fulfilling that future. You can relate more positively. Speaking purely in abstraction, if you were in a situation where the problems seemingly are intractable and there is a deficit in physical and human resource terms to cope with these problems, you might, as a part of your presence, do the best that you can. But at the same time, while doing the best, you might say that your best will never be good enough; their best would never be good enough; and therefore, it's very difficult to ... it's a little difficult to put as positive a face on what you do or to go at it with a certain kind of enthusiasm.

There's also another factor which is not an intangible factor - it's a real factor - it is your apperception or one's apperception or a group's apperception of how vigorous or how dedicated a particular regime or government or people might be in pursuing their own betterment economically and politically, speaking in strictly abstract terms. You are influenced by your environment, and that environment, which is made up of many factors, really conditions how you respond to a particular situation.

Q: Could you give us some concrete examples of the things you're saying?

NELSON: Well, I was purposely speaking in a kind of abstract way ... but let's say, if you are a member of the underclass - and this would apply in any situation - and someone comes along with an affirmative action program, or whatever the case might be, or open enrollment or whatever, it's not very meaningful because you do not have the assets which enable you to take advantage of an affirmative action opportunity or an open enrollment or whatever the case might be, and when you say the assets, you're talking in concrete terms. You have to talk in terms of leadership; you have to talk in terms of resources and all the rest. Therefore, you relate, I think, sometimes unconsciously or consciously, or just humanly so, to different situations in terms of chances for the meaningful employment of resources of whatever kind and whatever type in concert with other resources and with other people, and so forth. You are influenced by where you are and the environmental context in which you are functioning. And if that is not negative in a sense ... if that is negative, and it can be negative in many different kinds of ways, then this does affect how institutionally or individually or groupwise one relates to that particular situation.

Q: You talked a few minutes ago about the great differences between the peoples and the governments of those three countries. Could you elaborate on that a little before we proceed to the next main question? How were they different?

NELSON: Well, we had a monarchy in Lesotho; we had a monarchy in Swaziland; and there's an old saying the king should reign but not rule. That may have been more the case in Lesotho, but the opposite of that is the fact in Swaziland. And that determines, I guess you'd say, in the case of Swaziland, how people relate, how the government relates. Swaziland, you might say, functions in a kind of way as a national ... as a tribal nation with the king at the head, the apex of his tribe. And even though you at one time did have a parliament which ceased to function at one point in Swaziland ... what can I say ... let's see - it gave a different characterization to the country.

Q: In what way?

NELSON: In terms of its modernity, in terms of how government related to people and how people in a sense functioned within a governmental context, because it was a tribal context. This was not the case in Lesotho. We had a parliament and a prime minister. And I think you would have to say that there the prime minister was a very strong force and his party was a relatively strong force, but there were difficulties as well.

In Botswana I think you had outstanding leadership. You had a functioning parliamentary body, you had functioning political parties, and it was a different atmosphere in the sense that there was ... even though it was a multi-party system ... there was a kind of oneness and quite possibly a sense of real momentum and progress in which government and people were participating fully and effectively. This is not to say that there isn't a good economy, or wasn't a good economy in Swaziland. It's a different kind of economy, not a ... In a tribal or family environment, there definitely is a head and you might say that when decisions are made, that decisions are made, or when actions are taken (or however you might wish to characterize it), they might be taken in a headlike or ... in other words, paternal ... and if the father says this is what we do then that's what is done and maybe you don't like it, or whatever the case may be, but you do it, and it's more edict and less participatory. Those kinds of differences.

Q: Could you describe the political climate in Botswana when you went there as the first American Ambassador?

NELSON: Political climate within Botswana? I think in a real sense that there was a very positive political climate. Very positive in the sense that ... this is repetitious ... but there was effective leadership; political parties were well organized; the major party functioned effectively; they governed effectively - it was a parliamentary system, of course. The elections were contested, and contested in a good way, although it was somewhat difficult sometimes to find real meaningful differences between candidates or contestants. And we're no strangers to that even here in the United States.

The parliament was vigorous. I used to attend parliamentary sessions and there was good participation, good debate. And while civil service is not political in pure terms, you had a government that was well managed and, of course, an effective management beneath your ministers, deputy ministers, etc., vice ministers, or whatever the case might be. An effective administrative-managerial cadre, although it wasn't a very deep cadre, deep in terms of numbers, gave meaning to and was able to implement the policies and the political direction or aims of the government or as they were set out by the political leadership or the party. And even though you had ... not even though - that's the wrong way to put it ... but ... while there were at least three parties existing, you had the feeling that regardless of their party differences, that this was a political system that has as its orientation the imperative that Botswana should progress and that in achieving this progress that it should be done in a participatory manner and that all should ... all its people ... should benefit from this progress. For example, the President's tribe was the Bamangwato tribe, and some of the very significant mineral resources in Botswana were on Bamangwato land, tribal land. And we would assume in theory that it would be possible for this resource, in a sense, and the fruits of this resource, to reside solely with the Bamangwato people in the concept of tribal land. But that was not the case and there was never any question, I would say, that even though it was in this tribal area that this resource existed, despite that, that resource was to benefit all Botswanans. So I think, you know, the feeling that one received was that yes, we had political parties, we contest with each other, overall participants, we're all Botswanans, and Botswana and Botswana's well being is dominant, and the benefits of Botswana, be they intrinsic benefits or material benefits, should flow to all of its citizens.

Q: As the first American Ambassador to Botswana, how were you perceived by the government of that country?

NELSON: Well, I think the Botswanans were pleased to have the first American Ambassador resident in their country. I never had any question, once I became knowledgeable, of acceptance. There wasn't a large foreign representation in terms of diplomatic missions in Botswana, but I'd been told, and I guess I'd have to say, modesty aside I suppose, that the President and others felt that in terms of the diplomatic representation in Botswana that our representation was number one, I suppose ... and I'm not talking about the United States, but about the manner in which we were able to relate to the President, his family and the other officials and the people of Botswana. I still have, and treasure very deeply, relationships with Botswanans today. I felt also that while I had a very proper and open official relationship with the President, that we also had a personal relationship which was equally open and equally rewarding. But at the same time, one did not intrude upon the other, because in your official relationship, there are times when you have to relate in a way which may not ... or you have to present issues or questions or whatever where the official position of Botswana is contrary to the official position of the United States nationally or in the U.N., or whatever the case might be. But that ... those kinds of official differences of view really never got in the way of a positive relationship, both officially and personally.

Q: How were you perceived by the governments of Lesotho and Swaziland?

NELSON: I think for observance there was the fact that I was not a resident in either of the countries. There was ... the only terms I could think of is distance, but the distance was there geographically, but you did not have the continuing, almost daily, official and social association. Therefore ... I didn't want to say closeness, or whether it was even conceived that when you're an official from a government relating to the officials of another government that there should be closeness. I don't know - but that ... it was not the same as it was in Botswana.

In the times that I was present in the country, we had a free and easy relationship with King Moshoeshoe, at least in ... I think. I used to visit the ministers and some civil servants and the prime minister when I was in the country, and at virtually all times, regardless of the situation or the individuals involved, we were capable of relating effectively to one another. I think that's about all I can talk about Lesotho.

Swaziland ... King Sobhuza is the oldest reigning monarch in the world actually and whatever you might say, he is a tremendous presence and a person who I think sincerely wants the best for his people. I remember when I went to present my credentials to the king, and, of course, he was in his national dress, his ministers there in striped trousers and cutaway coats, and I walked in and I was presented to him and he said, "Oh, I thought you were just another Swazi," or something like that. I think he is a tremendous individual, a tremendous person and I think a wise person who has led Swaziland effectively and in the direction which in his terms is the best for Swaziland. Where outsiders are concerned, I think quite possibly the king is more remote than maybe King Moshoeshoe, who, of course, is a much younger person. The king's officials and his ministers, and so on, that I had contact with were receptive, understanding, and so on. I have a great admiration for the people of Lesotho and I think we have some very good friends there as well. It was a country that you could have nothing but admiration for and particularly in terms of their people. It's a country where you have very high literacy. Its university which then became part of the University for Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland, was first called Pope Pius XII University, actually. And the people are very well trained and have high skills. Population ... the Lesotho women are fully participant and a very dominant factor in their society. I guess it's the way that countries are, in a sense, endowed. Lesotho's endowment is quite meager, but its endowment, in a sense, is in its people. And this strikes one. And, of course, the Lesothos are involved in this country and they say something about people who come out of a situation where they live on the hills and so on.

Swaziland is ... because of its ... as I've indicated before, kind of tribal situation where it's a large family and with the king as the head. The members of that tribal nation in a sense ... you get a different ... another kind of relationship. I don't know how to characterize it quite frankly. And, of course, I've said enough about Botswana.

Q: Thank you. One of the questions we always ask our ambassadors is how you were perceived by the country of your post, but then we also try to ask how you were perceived by your peers, and when we ask that question we are talking about other United States ambassadors. Some of the earlier black ambassadors indicated that occasionally they found themselves being introduced to people and the individuals would say, "Oh fine, how do you like our country?" And they would have some difficulty understanding that there were black United States ambassadors. Had that changed by the time you became an ambassador in '71, or did you have any difficulties at all, do you think?

NELSON: Well, I remember once when I was ... we were in Ethiopia ... I was not an ambassador then but I was Deputy Director of AID Mission to Ethiopia. I was complimented by an Embassy staffer on the fact that I spoke good English. Within the southern African context, we did have Chiefs of Mission meetings and things of that kind, and, of course, they knew who you were and you were treated correctly and accepted by them. I would also say this: that I think it's still true that the old school tie sort of thing ... I always said I was in the State Department as an ambassador, but it's also true I wasn't of the State Department ... you understand my distinction. You can be in a group; at the same time you're not part of that group. So I was in the State Department, I can say, not through my own efforts, but in a sense I didn't spring from the State Department and then therefore I wasn't of the State Department.

Q: What difference did that make?

NELSON: Well, I think there are real differences. You're a relative but you're not really part of the inner family. And that ... you know there's a formal ... in all organizations there's a formal structure and there's an informal structure. You can probably participate effectively in the formal sense, but in the informal sense where things probably are accomplished with greater ease or more effectively, you're not a part of that structure since you aren't really born to it, you would say. The persons that I ... the ambassadors that I've associated with in southern Africa, some were political, some were career. And, of course, your staffs are all career persons and their objective, I guess, and the objective of most Foreign Service officers is that they want the achievement, the career achievement that they seek is to be an ambassador. And in a sense, here is an outsider who is fulfilling that role, or is in that role, and he doesn't spring, or he or she doesn't spring from their group. Therefore, you really don't know their tribal ways, we'll say, and sometimes it's sufferance, sometimes it's acceptance, and sometimes it falls in between. I'm talking not just about other ambassadors ... I'm talking about other Foreign Service people with whom you would be most associated.

So in the formal sense, you're recognized; people rise when you enter the room, and all the rest of it. You have to leave before they can leave ... and all these little niceties or protocolish kinds of customs are followed and in some instances, in good spirit and with no distinction, and in other instances, with not too good a spirit and with some differences. That may be less so today but I think the Foreign Service of the United States is still a relatively tightly held group which rejects those who are not, in a sense, to the manor born. I think that's diminishing but elitism is there and all the kinds of things which derive ... or which flow from a kind of elitist environment.

Q: What were some of the problems you faced as Ambassador to Botswana?

NELSON: Problems in what sense?

Q: Across the board. Let's talk about a typical day in the life of an ambassador in Botswana.

NELSON: Oh, a typical day? Well, you go to the office and you read, you read, you read, you read a great deal of correspondence, a great deal of cable traffic and if you want to really be knowledgeable, you do have to immerse yourself in all the things which relate to your country of assignment, and to ... as well as to ... I want to say exogenous kinds of factors which influence, or have an influence upon your country of assignment. So therefore there is, I think, considerable continuing keeping abreast of events, issues, questions, positions, policy representations and all the rest. Then, of course, you have staff supervision. You try to, without wearing out your welcome, keep a relationship going with particular functionaries of the government. I always like to visit about the countryside as much as possible because you don't know a country by residing continuously in the capital city. You have the question of looking at the function of other U.S. programs and function of other U.S. personnel, say economic assistance programs, or Peace Corps or whatever the case might be. We worked almost continuously in terms of building up our U.S. library with an interest in bringing others to the country, people like Nikki Giovanni, at one time, and others in terms of activities. The other question of trying to achieve a means whereby officials of the country can visit the United States under one auspices of another.

When I was in Botswana there was participation by American companies in exploitation of mineral resources in Botswana. And while you were interested in and sought private ... positive private participation in enterprise in Botswana, you also ... well, I was concerned that Botswana be represented effectively in any negotiations or whatever that might go on. Because having concern that Botswanans were protecting their own interests meant, I think, that there would be a mutual, beneficial enterprise arising. If it was exploitative, then it was not, in the long term, or even in the near term, really beneficial or truly beneficial.

Therefore, I remember working with a Ford Foundation representative in Botswana. I'd known him in Tanzania. We were both there. We ... I couldn't do it but his offices could do it - effected a means whereby Botswana had available to it legal talent, outside legal talent, that could work with their own trained lawyers in making certain that negotiations, or how you might wish to characterize it, were equal around the table. As you will find that even though large corporations have their own legal staffs, when they go into these types of negotiations, enterprise development, they hire the best New York law firms possible, and therefore while the government has its attorneys general and other legal persons, but it is important that the government avail itself of other legal resources or expertise or engineering expertise or whatever the case might be. This is one of the things that I was concerned about and others were concerned about. And in a sense, while this isn't ... some people would say it's not directly a responsibility, I think it is still very true that while we encourage participation of American private concerns in other countries, we have to be concerned, if that participation is going to be fruitful, that there be equality in terms of any arrangements that ... might be arrived at. It's one thing to encourage the participation, but it's another thing - and you can stop there - I think that there's an extra step that needs to be taken, whether this is in the job description or not, to make certain that the interests of all parties are served and served well, because if it goes the other way, it's only going to be a wound which will have to be healed.

Q: What were some of the major United States companies operating in Botswana at the time?

NELSON: Oh, we had American Metals Climax from New York. Some of the banks were interested. American Metals Climax was the primary one, actually. I can't recall the others.

Q: What about Lesotho?

NELSON: Lesotho. .When I was there on my visits (I'll call them short stays) I usually traveled and looked at various undertakings, particularly on the development side, where we were engaged in working with the government. Well, I think this is not particular to Lesotho. I think it's probably particular to all countries in Africa, but we're speaking about Lesotho. In my view, the overriding question in Lesotho was development. How was Lesotho, a country which is of a limited endowment, as I said before - they did have diamonds at one time - surrounded, an island within the Republic of South Africa, a mountainous country which is plagued by erosion, soil erosion, practically all the topsoil in Lesotho has flowed down into South Africa, how a country which has as its primary enterprise the export of labor with a considerable portion of its male population absent from the country for a significant period of time, how was a country such as Lesotho going to develop and develop in a meaningful way? To me, this, as I say, was the overriding issue and it was a concern which coincided with my background in development work, and I think it was a concern of the Lesotho people or the Lesotho Government to determine and foster the kind of economic and social development activity which would enhance national well-being. Therefore, when I was in Lesotho, I spent a great deal of time with people of the various "action ministries," and in traveling about the country looking at activities that we were engaged in with the government which were developmental in nature. There were also questions from time to time in terms of food, the bringing in of PL-480 commodities from the United States, and working with our AID people - the economic assistance people - in attempting to see, within the resources available to us, how we could become purposeful participants in development activity. Also, I attempted to talk with the Prime Minister on each occasion I was there to get some feel for his concerns, direction, and I even used to make a number of visits with him to activities that we had assisted, or activities which his government was undertaking with their own resources. We looked at, as well, participation in Lesotho by other governments or other concerns. There was some participation, for example, there was a Holiday Inn, the southern African branch of Holiday Inns in Lesotho. There was participation by other groups dominant in South African concerns. And the idea, of course, is to get some appreciation of how this mix of activities was progressing and the kinds of contributions, positive or negative contributions that they might be making to Lesotho.

Also, it was important to speak to members and converse with the members of Parliament and I think we had one meeting which was rather interesting because this was the day with Mokhehle, who was really an opposite in personality in Lesotho and who eventually fled the country. And I remember on one of my visits there, for the first time in a number of years, he came into the Embassy and we sat down and we talked. He had been angry - concerned because he had felt that Peace Corps volunteers had involved themselves politically. There was a time when the Peace Corps did not function in Lesotho and the Peace Corps at the particular time we talked ... was in Lesotho. And we talked about that a little bit, and of course, he said then, of course, that he did not object to Peace Corps volunteers if ... they were artisans, or they did practical things, but he didn't like "A.B. generalists," which was one of the things he was somewhat prejudiced about, that you could take a person with an A.B. degree from the United States and just because it is developed think that they could make a contribution in some developing countries, which is not exactly the way it was put, but there was a great surge at one time to recruit A.B. generalists and that A.B. generalist could then be given skills which would enable them to contribute to the development of a country or to participate effectively and work effectively in other countries.

So it was this kind of mix, I suppose, meeting with ministers, civil servants, politicians in and out of government, business people, and going about the countryside to get an appreciation of the problem on one hand, and the kind of response which the international community, the U.N. and other donor agencies there in Lesotho, the kind of response which was ... of which America, the United States was a part, which was being mounted to cope with the development issue, economic issues, and social issues in Lesotho. The dominant thing was that here is a nation which, as I said, exported manpower, which has an effect on the social fabric of the country, and what can you do with ... in an economic sense, or development sense, recognizing the depletion, depleted land mass and all the rest of it, to bring about the kinds of activities which could substitute for having to work in the mines in South Africa. So in general that's more or less how I responded in the Lesotho situation - but, of course, there are always cocktail parties and things of that kind (laughter).

Q: What kinds of programs really can substitute for that kind of situation?

NELSON: Agricultural development? Lesotho has to feed itself. I think it's probably true to say that Lesotho is not capable of feeding itself from its own resources ... from its own agricultural resources at this time.

Q: Would it ever be?

NELSON: Quite possibly it could. And there is a real need to institute the kinds of conservation practices which will halt, if not ... or at least slow down, the tremendous erosion that takes place in that country. There's a possibility of a small industrial enterprise. The Lesotho weavers, they're quite good craftspeople. Tourism, which is one thing the government was quite interested in ... in other words, viable economic activity. I would say basically labor-intensive in character (can't say everything is capital-intensive) that would employ significant numbers of people and which would permit them to earn a livelihood which would obviate the necessity, as I say, to work in the mines of South Africa. That's no easy task because again, the wages which the workers in South Africa repatriated to Lesotho - and Lesotho also had the rand in currency at that time - was one of the most significant earnings, or resource earnings which the government has.

Q: What about your concerns in Swaziland?

NELSON: Well, to me Swaziland is a very attractive country, a beautiful country, and has asbestos ... there's a very significant mine, the Havelock Mine, which mines asbestos and an iron ore mine which was played out. The difficulty of processing the ore was such that it was not economically feasible, or becoming less feasible, plus the mine ... resources being depleted. They had a wood pulp factory. These were foreign-owned enterprises, of course. And basically it's an agricultural country: tree crops and also ground crops, cereals. And while I can't go into it at length, the rather difficult tenure system in that all the land, I believe this is correct, was tribally held. And here the questions arise in terms of a person's ability to farm land, to enclose land and also some questions of incentive if the land isn't owned, and I think some questions arise about our main activity in the agricultural field.

Tourism was another activity in Swaziland, but beneath all of this, from the economic activity that was going forth in Swaziland and the other activity that could be encouraged or supported - that the resources that were generated from such activity flowed more directly to the Swazi people. In other words, it wasn't or would not be exploitative, I guess you'd say.

Q: You said that the main, perhaps, the main activity that you were involved in was in the agricultural area. Could you give us some examples of the kinds of things you were involved in?

NELSON: Well, the U.S. Government, the economic assistance program, was working with, I think, the U.K. and certain other donors, and the U.N., also, in terms of practices, cultural practices, and cultural innovations. I think you could say, better care of the land, better use of the land, protection of the land in terms of erosion and things of this kind, the demarcation of land in terms of one or more crops as over against cattle or other animals. This was a problem that we were working on and we brought in heavy equipment and certain other things with which to bring land into cultivation and attempting to erect a means whereby land that was brought into cultivation could be shared out by farmers. We also were doing some work in health but not in education per se. We had some people in the agricultural wing of the University of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland, which is no longer existent in that form. It was in Swaziland we were providing some faculty staff to the agricultural segment of the University.

Swaziland also had a Holiday Inn. In fact, all three countries did.

Q: The agricultural activity that you were involved in in Swaziland, was any of that same kind of thing going on in Lesotho?

NELSON: Yes....

Q: In terms of trying to ... the soil.

NELSON: Yes, there was, yes.

Q: Of your work in Botswana, what would you consider to have been your most, I wouldn't say outstanding achievements, but which of your accomplishments there do you feel happiest about?

NELSON: Speaking in general terms, which is about the best way I can approach this question, I think I can say that we became very affirmative participants in development in Botswana. There were, in taking the region as a whole, because that was how the AID program was structured at that time. I can't give you a precise number but there was in a real sense, I would say, a quantum jump in U.S. participation in terms of ... in development activity, and a significant portion of this quantum was in Botswana, and I think represented a significant contribution in terms of resource flows to development activity in the country. And again, I think, somewhat repetitiously, as newly independent countries, or in Botswana as a newly independent country, its primary concern was a development concern, a concern for positive exploitation of its resources in order to meet economic and other demands. And I believe quite firmly that these kinds of considerations, development considerations, far outweigh strictly political considerations. If a country is progressing and if people's lives are better and they can see improvement, in a whole variety of factors or areas, then if you're concerned about stability, this is the best way to assure it. If you're concerned about a country's ability to participate meaningfully in the area or in the world at large, this is a way to assure it. Development ... these are countries that became independent ... these are countries that were liberated, development is liberation, development reinforces liberation, reinforces independence. I think, you know, you cannot gainsay the fact that in terms of U.S. interests, Lesotho, for example, or Botswana or Swaziland, doesn't rank very high on the scale of things the way our world is oriented - East, West, and all the rest of it. But there is also, I think, an ethical or moral commitment of a kind where if we are participating and if we want to have an effective relationship with country A or country B for whatever reason or whatever purpose, then the thing which can make that relationship significant is to contribute in those areas where national needs are recognized and where a contribution will be of some significance in affirming the independence which that country has achieved. And that in doing so, you foster a relationship which is more enduring and which enables the relationship to be one of ... more mutual in nature ... What I'm trying to say, I guess, is that while the countries may not be equal in terms of wealth or whatever the case might be, but if a country is secure in its own right and you're participating in their achieving that sense of security, then the relationship that you have becomes more equal and becomes more positive, even supportive, because it isn't a relationship of weak to strong; it's a relationship of a country which is strong in its own right. That's a little awkward, but I think, you know, if an individual feels that he is progressing, his outlook or relationship with others, etc. takes on a different character than if he feels he is stalemated, depressed or whatever. He can't relate positively, in his environment or with others. (Inaudible) and probably the personalities, too.

Q: True. As ambassador to these three countries, in what area or what areas were you most disappointed?

NELSON: Well, I would have liked to have done more during the time I was there in contributing to their progress, and again, this is couched in development terms and not to a national factor. Because it affects them and maybe it wasn't even feasible, but one would have liked to have seen more positive movement in the region in terms of some of the issues and problems which exist today, in a kind of way that is outside of Botswana, but the picture that we draw is that here are Botswana and the other countries as well with the various large and strong country of South Africa, controlling access both externally and internally. There was then the Rhodesian question, the Angola question, and the Namibian question, and all of these issues and problems affect these countries and affect them quite deeply. Not that they would be irresponsible, but their actions in many ways are conditioned by the fact that access to the outside world must flow through South Africa or access of the outside world to them must in a sense flow in such a direction. The only thing (inaudible) if there was some means by which we could have built a bridge from Botswana to Zambia, for example, these kinds of things will come in time, but these countries need alternatives and alternatives significantly in terms of transport and...

For example, when I was in Botswana, there was a meat crisis, I guess you'd say, in Zambia, and through some arrangements with a government undertaking ... arrangements which were helpful, I guess we'd say, in facilitating in the ... using Alaskan Airlines, if I'm not mistaken, flying meat into Zambia, because Zambia was deficit in corn, in maize or corn, deficit in meat and the Botswanan Government was airlifting meat to Zambia using these airplanes. I think that had a significant effect because it is the relationship between Botswana and the mass land of Africa and also people can become somewhat restive if they're hungry. So what I'm just trying to say is that I think more can be done in providing alternatives to countries such as Swaziland, or Botswana in particular. Very difficult in terms of Lesotho. But these kinds of really viable alternatives at that time and even to a great extent now, are dependent upon other situations and other problems which need addressing.

We did some roadwork in Botswana and improved internal communications, opening up areas, and we were in a sense right up to the river which this ferry crosses for about a ten to fifteen minute ferry ride ... It could have been great. Instead of having a ferry link we could have had, in a sense, a land link ... certainly wasn't politically feasible then and probably isn't quite feasible now. But transportation is, I think, a very key consideration in this area, and it's one where I would have liked to have seen, if possible, greater progress during the time that I was there, admittedly that such progress needs to be linked to the solutions of issues and other questions.

Q: What are your fondest memories of those three countries?

NELSON: Oh, he's dead now, but I used to admire Seretse Khama and Lady Khama, and I think it was an opportunity, in a sense privilege, to have that kind of association, not only with the Khamas and their family but the other people of Botswana. I think that this is probably the significant thing in any tenure in a country situation. You don't bring away material things. Sure we all collect souvenirs, artifacts of one kind or another, but it's the intangibles that count and it's like the satisfaction is mostly psychic because you take satisfaction out of other people's achievements and things which you think are meaningful or important. But to me the thing that you take away which is probably ... gives you the greatest memory is an association or the association with people from other countries, from other places, from other cultures, from other traditions. And the fact that you could bridge all these differences and come upon something which you have in common and erect a friendship or relationship which contributed to your own development and your own sense of well-being towards people ... associations with people. All that kind of means much to you in a very personal sense.

Q: Have there been any lasting friendships from that era?

NELSON: I think so, yes, I think so. Then, of course, today I follow the activities within the countries as closely as time permits because I am interested in them and invested some of me in them, and I'm interested in their progress.

Q: If you had the opportunity to return to Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland today, what would you do differently from the last time?

NELSON: Return in the same occupation?

Q: In the same occupation - as ambassador.

NELSON: What would I do differently?

Q: If anything....

NELSON: Although I traveled extensively often in the countries, I think I would travel more, get about the countries more. That's one thing.

Q: Anything in Botswana specifically?

NELSON: This doesn't mean to imply that I did everything properly, but I really can't think of anything at this particular time, at this juncture.

Q: Lesotho.

NELSON: I think quite possibly I should have spent more time in Lesotho; the same would be true of Swaziland.

Q: Could you have had?

NELSON: In my view, I could not. Also, when you have chargés in the countries who revert to the position of deputy chiefs of mission when you're present, it materially affects their pay for one thing. And also I think there's a balance that has to be struck, unless you're talking strictly in embassy terms. That person who is the chargé has to feel that he has the kind of dominant responsibility and you know, if you're dropping in every other week or every two weeks or whatever the case might be, I think you intrude upon that sense of responsibility. And also, although this is pure guess, do you negatively affect his or her relationships with the peoples of that government? In other words, can they look to him as the responsible ... a responsible person in terms of their needs or requirements or whatever the case might be, or do they have to look outside? So in, I guess, retrospect, although it would have been beneficial to me to have spent more time in the other countries, quite possibly in the end it wouldn't have been the most effective way to do business.

I think the other thing, and this is strictly in bureaucratic terms, although I did pursue this and possibly might have pursued it with more vigor, is the fact that I think it is very important that if the ambassador is in a country that the heads of the other elements of the U.S. Government, such as USIS, the AID person, be resident in the country where the ambassador is resident. I'm sure that the heart of the motivation in sharing out the heads of these three organizations amongst the three countries was that you have this and they have that, and you have this and they have that

Q: So that everybody has the sense of having a U.S. presence?

NELSON: Although the U.S. presence was there anyhow. If you're going to have a situation where one person as the ambassador to three countries then I think that he or she should have the heads of the other agencies resident with him because, as I said, it's more effective to relate face to face or personally than to relate on another kind of basis of communications, or telephone, which is an insecure instrument anyhow. And I did find an occasional visit ... so that would have been much more preferable ... that would have been more preferable for me ... and quite possibly a more effective way of directing and knitting together the U.S. effort in the countries.

Q: If you were addressing a group of youngsters who'd expressed an interest in becoming ambassadors one day, what kind of advice would you give them?

NELSON: Well, probably to submerge that ambition (laughter). Ah, not in the sense that it's not a job that's interesting, but I guess, and I don't know what gives rise to this, it's some kind of subliminal feeling or something. It's all right to have the ambition, but so much has to go before it. I think that, in my own terms, I was very fortunate coming into this kind of a position in that I had spent about nineteen years, let's say, involved, the preponderance of which I had been resident overseas. I lived in the Far East, the Middle East and in Africa, and I had an opportunity to work with other people, to work with other governments, to become vitally concerned with how the U.S. relates through its activities to other governments, to other people. The kinds of possibilities and programs or potential which the United States has to ... at its reach to function cooperatively with other governments. And I've had the ... (and this I think is quite crucial) the experience, we'll say, of working with people of various cultures, with officials, with presidential leaders, or whatever the case might be. And that this kind of experience stood me in very good stead, I think, and was good preparation and good background for serving as an ambassador to these countries. If I had been taken from some other occupation, such as school teacher, or strictly within the U.S. context, it would have taken me much, much longer to gain the kind of insights, we'll say, which enables one to hopefully perform effectively in another country, in another cultural situation, so I think in that sense I was very fortunate.

I guess if I was talking to some young person who had this as a goal, and having that as a goal he would probably be interested in the Foreign Service or at least some branch of international activity, governmental international activity, and he or she was in a preparative stage, I think academically I would suggest or urge that they become steeped in history or some specialization, of course, knowledgeable of a language, to know something about economics, something about administration, political science, all these things which they sort of group under international relations these days. To have some anthropological insights, and maybe I'm prejudiced, but I do think that Peace Corps experiences are very meaningful ones for people to have, young people I guess you'd have to say here, because it does, providing the person is so inclined, permit one to function in another environment without too much of the trappings or labeling of U.S. Government or whatever. Not that Peace Corps volunteers live off the soil, but they live at a level and in a job context or work context which permits them to become very knowledgeable of other people. And that's probably the greatest benefit the Peace Corps has, because still the United States is very parochial; we're a very parochial people, and look at ... sometime, other countries and other people, cultures as suspect. But when you come down to it, there's more sameness on the part of people than in a real sense the differences. These are some of the kinds of things which I would suggest to someone who had this kind of ambition. And you don't have to do it all through government. There are other kinds of activities or programs where one can get some kind of international experience, be it business or through exchange professorships or Fulbrights or whatever. Cultural shock we talk about a great deal; I think cultural shock is real. It's probably not as meaningful but it's real.

So I guess I can sum it up by saying that I think there's a particular kind of academic preparation which is ... which gives one an added advantage, and also I think some involvement outside the United States, whatever form it might take and regardless of the region of the country where this kind of involvement might take place, builds background added to perception, or however you might wish to characterize it, which would contribute to one's effectiveness in the job of a diplomat.

I do think that you don't get rich working for the government but I would like to see more people, more American blacks become involved in international activity, be it government or non-government. You gain a great deal by going outside the United States and functioning and also permits you at the same time to look back at the United States, and you can't do that too easily here in the United States. But if we're to be truly representative, pluralism and all that sort of thing we talk about, then I think it's sort of mandated that our representation at all levels outside our national boundaries fully reflect our own society. To that end I think that the American black is distinctly under-represented in international activity or life. And certainly Africa isn't the only region in the world.

Q: Do you think you enjoyed ... well, let's see, do you think you had any special hardships or problems because of your blackness as an ambassador, I mean, and particularly to those three countries?

NELSON: No. I do not believe ... you're an American regardless of whether that's my fault or not, and that to me is the way that you're first perceived. Blackness doesn't get, in my strong view, does not have to be a plus in an African situation and does not have to be a minus or a negative. I think it's very important that you relate as a representative, whatever you may represent, on the basis of your own self. And it should be no different than if you have red hair or blonde hair, or whatever the case might be, or blue eyes, green eyes, or brown eyes; that's the ideal of course. People in other countries are truly cognizant of our society and they're truly cognizant of the problems which reside in it. But when you, in the first instance, you are a representative of the President, you're a representative of the United States, and that is what clothes you when you go to a country, black or whatever. And my impression is that is how you're looked at and that's initially. What follows is predominantly on the basis of how well you fulfill that function, how well you relate, your ability to interact, your perception and presence, and all that. In very plain terms, if you're a dummy, it doesn't make any difference what you look like. Whiteness won't help you; blackness won't help you. Well, I think if you can carry water on both shoulders, they'll say fine. I have seen this in other situations. I think people who attempt to take a characteristic and use that as a crutch or means to fulfillment or achievement or whatever the case might be, are soon found out, and I think the persons or whatever, whoever, this is being used in that way resent it. The same old thing - if you're patronizing some individual, you may think you're ingratiating, but the person knows when he's being patronized. Therefore, if you use the characteristic or symbol of blackness to make your way, then others might not think that works and it's not something you can ride upon. There was a fellow who went with the Peace Corps over to Nigeria as Peace Corps Rep, and he was very surprised one day when he was in a barbershop or someplace and he was called a European. He didn't look like a European, but in foreign terms, a European doesn't mean a person who's white particularly; it means a person who is a stranger, who is a foreigner, so I think that's the way we are regarded; we are American. It isn't a detriment or any negative faith. It's more in terms of other Americans than in terms of other nationals. Because all Americans carry their baggage, cultural baggage, with them. They don't deposit it at the Customs as they leave JFK or whatever the case may be.

Q: This brings us down into the first half of the questioning ...

NELSON: You mean I haven't been questioning ... you mean I haven't been verbose enough?
(laughter)

Q: No, but it's just that in that second half what we wanted to do was start with your birth in Michigan and really come right on up through those other years that you talked about with your work in the State Department, the rest of your professional career, and you would probably want to take a break before we do that second half. Is there anything else, though, that you'd like to say about those three countries - Botswana, Swaziland, Lesotho - before we close out this session?

NELSON: Let me think about that for a moment ...

Q: All right, all right. Then shall we take a break?

NELSON: Sure.

Q: Thank you.

Ambassador Nelson, this morning we talked about your years as ambassador to those three countries and perhaps later on we shall back up and add a bit more to that, but at this session we'd like to focus on you, the individual, your early years really beginning with your birth in Michigan.

NELSON: Well, I was born in Battle Creek, Michigan, a small town in the east southern part of the state. I attended elementary school in Battle Creek and junior high school and high school, completing high school in 1938. I went after graduation to Lincoln University in Pennsylvania, where I graduated in 1942 having majored in political science and economics. Almost immediately after graduation I was drafted in the Army, spent some weeks at Fort Custer in Michigan, near Battle Creek; then subsequently went to Fort McClelland, Alabama for basic training, and after basic training I went to Fort Hood in Texas, where I attended the Officer Candidate School-Tank Service. I went overseas in 1943 and in Europe - primarily just to the U.K., then to France, Germany, Austria, returning back to the United States in 1947. On my return from the Army I went to New York University, where I attended the Graduate School for Public Service, got a master's degree, and completed my work for a doctorate, but before I could complete all the requirements beyond the academic requirements, it was necessary, of course, to go to work, because in 1947 after the war I was married to the former Maureen Tinsley of Knoxville, Tennessee.

Q: Your parents?

NELSON: My parents, Schuyler Adam Nelson and Daisey B. Nelson were from Bowling Green in Kentucky ... had a small business in Battle Creek and my mother was a nurse at the Battle Creek Sanitarium. Battle Creek is noted for, or was noted for its sanitarium, which was run by one of the Kellogg brothers, John Harvey Kellogg, and, of course, Kellogg Cereals, which was his brother, W. K. Kellogg. I have two brothers, two older brothers who are both in California at this juncture, one in northern California and one in southern California, Los Angeles. I would think that my life in Battle Creek was relatively uneventful. I do remember at one time I was interested in the sciences and in medicine and one of our former senators who heard me give a presentation in class offered a scholarship if I would wish to go to medical school. But that was a direction which I did not take.

After graduate school in New York I went to work for the New York State Commission on Coordination of State Activities, which was in a sense an executive/legislative commission headed up by the chairman of the Senate Finance Committee in New York. The Commission was in a sense a little Hoover-type commission which was concerned with the organization, management and efficiency of government departments of the State government. While there I worked on the Department of Education and also on the Civil Service Department doing analytical studies of management policies and writing up reports and recommendations for these two departments. The head of the commission, after my first year there, was the head of the graduate school that I attended at New York University, William Ronan, actually. I stayed with the Commission until 1952 because in a sense there wasn't too much future in working for that particular commission. I should also say I guess that the first year I worked in Albany, I commuted between Albany and New York City because, like young people, we felt we couldn't leave New York City. Now we realize we couldn't live in New York City. Then we lived in a place called Clinton Heights, in a sense a suburb of Albany and for some three ... two years.

Because of the lack of opportunity on the commission and the staff for the commission, at the ... with the help of chairman, I came down to Washington, DC in 1952 for a week to look about and ascertain what opportunities might be available in the Federal government, and I think I was in Washington for maybe two or three days, and I had an offer of a job with the Mutual Security Agency as the program assistant in the Philippines. I came back to New York and talked this over with some of my friends who had been in graduate school with me. I happened to be in New York City at the time because we were having a commission meeting and we were staying at the Hotel Pierre. Their suggestion was that the offer was too low and was not commensurate in a sense with the academic training and the limited work experience which I had had up to that time. So I called Washington, or Washington called me (one of the two, I've forgotten now) and in a sense turned down the job, but fortunately I guess, Washington came back and offered me an additional grade, so I joined the Mutual Security Agency as, in those days, a Foreign Service staff officer of grade 8. The original offer was grade 9, which was so low that we couldn't even take an automobile overseas free with the Federal government paying the transportation charges. Some years later I talked to the husband of the personnel person who interviewed me and who made this job offer and they were saying to me how it was that in a sense how cheaply they had gotten me.

But anyhow, we came to Washington for orientation and in those days the building where we were actually located, which was a government building, was segregated. As with Washington in 1952, during coffee breaks we couldn't even go into the coffee shop and sit down, have a cup of coffee or sandwich or whatever the case might be. The only place you could eat in the downtown area in those days was the YWCA at 16th and K.

We went to the Philippines in October of 1952 and I was very fortunate in having a very good supervisor or boss or however you might wish to characterize it. I was in the Public Administration Division and after ... as a program assistant working on training and doing public administration jobs in the sense of advising the government, which task or assignment was more or less similar to the kind of work that I had done over in New York. After six months, my boss put me in for and I received a 2-grade promotion, so I went from Foreign Service Staff Officer Grade 8 to Foreign Service Staff Officer Grade 6. We served in the Philippines for five and a half years. Also, it was very fortunate that during this period, actually, almost immediately, my wife who was a psychiatric social worker joined the faculty at the University of Philippines, where she was responsible for organizing a school of social work and instituting a degree program, master's degree program in social work at the university. This was very fortunate for us in the sense that it gave us another segment of community to socialize and to be friends with, the university community, as well as the government community and other persons that we came to know. The fact that my wife worked and that I worked made, I would think, our transition from living in the United States to living overseas a smooth and easier one, because we really became in a sense kind of integrated into Philippine society.

During my service in the Philippines I worked on a number of things. I worked for the President's office when Magsaysay became president, organized the Presidential Complaint and Action Commission where any Philippine citizen could send a telegram to the President indicating he had a grievance or a difficulty or a complaint. Also, persons who lived in Manila or near Manila could come to the palace in those days and come in to the Presidential Complaints and Action Commission and lodge his complaint if he wished to do so. From this commission and the actions the President took in treating them, a book came into being, a person wrote a book called "Bare Feet in the Palace". Ramon Magsaysay was really a kind of people's president who, unfortunately, did not serve out his term, having been killed in an airplane accident.

I also worked again on the organization of the civil service system in the Philippines, worked on the organization of the budget office and did in an advisory role provide sort of organization and methods or management advisement to a number of government departments.

In 1955-56, my supervisor, boss, had gone to Egypt where he headed the Public Administration Division there, and he called me to Cairo, and I went over a period between 1955-56, where I worked as a management advisor on a temporary-duty basis to the Ministry of Education. The idea was that I would ... if I could work, you know, well with the Egyptian Government and there was a desire for my services, I would transfer from the Philippines to Egypt. And so this almost came to pass.

I returned to Manila in '56 and was prepared to transfer to Cairo when the Aswan Dam situation or contretemps arose. Therefore, I did not go to Egypt; I remained in the Philippines. I changed jobs at that time and became a special advisor to the Mission Director for Rural Development, and subsequently became Deputy Chief of the Rural Development Division. What we did in this program was to assist the Philippine Government establish out of the office of the President a community development program which attempted to work with rural people to create a structure at the lowest level where people could come together, pool their resources, and undertake development activity which they felt was needed in their particular environment. These activities were, in a sense, aided by the U. S. Government, and this was the President's Community Development Program. In launching this program - I did a great deal of organizational work, both on the Philippine side and the U.S. side - and as a part of this activity I did take a number of governors and a senator and a congressman and the young man who became the Presidential Assistant for Community Development to India and to Pakistan to see their programs and he had a rather famous community action program which was headed up at that time by S. K. Dey. I returned from India and Pakistan at this time to (inaudible) and the program came into being and I stayed with that program until 1958. In the meantime, the Mission Director of the Philippine Mission had gone to Iran and I was called to Iran to take a look at their Rural Development Program by him and subsequently we transferred to Iran, where I became head of the Rural Development Program in the Mission in Iran. I worked two years in Iran as head of this particular program, returning to the United States in 1960. Iran at that time, of course, the Shah was in place and the program that we were trying to do in concert with government was to give people, in a sense rural people, more of a stake in their own being. Also as a part of this process, I took the Minister of Interior, who had numerous functions to ... and two of his staff people to the Philippines, to Hong Kong, to Japan, to India and to Pakistan so that he could see some of the things that these other governments were doing. The Minister was also a major-general in the Iranian army and I think his wife told my wife that if he came back with new ideas and attempted to put those ideas in force that he wouldn't be in government very long. And that happened to be the case, actually.

Some incidents or comment are of interest I think. In the Philippines, we visited some of the local government officials, provincial governors, mayors and so on, and after one sort of free-flowing session with the governor and his staff, the general turned to me on our way back to the hotel saying that he felt that there was maybe just a little bit too much democracy in the Philippines. In Hong Kong the British police showed ... the Hong Kong police showed us, or demonstrated how they dealt with riot situations. This turned up in the general's report on how to deal with quarrelsome people. As a part of his function, he was also in charge of the national police, local government and other things in Iran, and I do believe that ... I'm certain that he really wanted to do something in his country which would provide a better future for the people of Iran.

Q: How did they deal with troublesome people?

NELSON: Very forcefully. The thing is that substituting quarrelsome people for riots, because you're not supposed to have riots or things like that in this type of Iranian regime, but I do believe that when he came back, the general tried to devise his own program of 57 points. Whether he had heard of Heinz or not I don't know, but ... in that country, in that administration, in that government, we have to say that his approach was very forward looking. But he was soon sent out of the country. He was sent to Cento as the Iranian representative in Turkey. While all this ... what I'm really saying is in a sense, this was a portent of the difficulties which occurred in Iran which are still taking place, as a reaction to the Shah's rule.

I returned to the United States in 1960 and went to Boston University for African Studies and then to Oxford and to the various metropolises - Brussels, Paris, and of course, London. I returned and ... after a year, I guess it was ... and worked for a short time for the AID Agency as Chief of Community Development for Latin America and Africa. Very fortunately, I think, a colleague of mine from the Philippines was working with Sargent Shriver in terms of possibilities of implementing the idea that the President had enunciated in his speech at the University of Michigan about a volunteer corps. I joined a group of about six people; Bill Moyers was one of them, Harris Wofford. And we worked on the preparation of a report for the President on how a volunteer program would work, how people would be obtained, where it would work and what kind of programs, such as the programs to be worked in, and so on. Maybe as a result of this report, but anyhow, the Peace Corps was created by Executive Order and subsequent to its creation, I went to the Philippines to, in a sense, negotiate with them on the Peace Corps and their receptivity to a Peace Corps program, which they did then accept and request. Then while I was in the Philippines, I was called to Nigeria to link up with Sargent Shriver to negotiate with the government officials there concerning the Peace Corps program, and then I also went to Ghana on my own to do the same thing. And needless to say, we had Peace Corps programs established also as a result of these visits in Ghana and in Nigeria.

I returned to Washington and joined, in a sense, the Peace Corps as Associate Director in charge of Program Development and Program Coordination. What we did in a sense was develop policies by which the ... governing the Peace Corps, approved programs worldwide, the budget, and we also did the congressional presentation. This was to me, in a sense, a unique experience.

Q: Did you ever approach a government about accepting Peace Corps that refused it?

NELSON: No.

Q: All accepted. Do you know of any countries that did refuse it? Or had them and....

NELSON: No, no, I do not. No, I do not. Tanzania had Peace Corps at one time and then they cut off the Peace Corps program, but the uniqueness of this experience was to participate in the development of a federal program such as the Peace Corps, an international program, and to be in at the creation of a particular agency, and the creation of an agency stemming from some of the work that you had done. We were to go overseas with the Peace Corps to Nigeria, and I did go to Nigeria a second time. I only went on a temporary-duty basis to prepare the way for William Saltonstall, who had been headmaster at Phillips-Exeter.

I did not stay with the Peace Corps because, well, what I said to Sargent Shriver was I was an FSR-2 at that time and there was \$75 difference between an FSR-2 and FSR-1, which is the top Foreign Service rank. If you give me an FSR-1, I would stay in Nigeria, but that didn't come to pass. So ... I had offers from the Peace Corps ... other Peace Corps directorships in Latin America. I returned to AID, where I became Director of the Office of Development Resources for a few months ... for six months, after which time I recommended that the office be abolished, and then became Director of North African Affairs for AID concerned with Washington oversight, management and direction of aid programs in the Sudan, in Morocco, Tunisia, Libya, Algeria, and also I dealt with something called the European Residuals such as the U.S.-owned currencies in Poland and Yugoslavia.

I stayed in Washington until 1966, when I went to Ethiopia as the Deputy Director of the AID Mission there, and I spent two years in Ethiopia, from '66 to '68. Then I went to Tanzania, where I became Director of the AID Mission, staying in Tanzania from 1968 to 1971, and from Tanzania I left to become Ambassador to Botswana, Lesotho, and Swaziland. After the ambassadorial appointment I returned to the United States and became ... and then went back overseas as Director of the AID Mission in Kenya, where I stayed for four years and then retired because I had the years of service, including military, etc., and of course, salaries as they are today for the upper reaches of the bureaucracy are frozen. In fact, today's higher graded civil servant doesn't even receive the 4.8% cost of living increase that was recently voted by Congress.

We retired to a place in Maryland, Rossmore, which was a leisure world retirement community, and after six months we decided that was not a feasible alternative and we moved back to our house in Washington in 1979. I retired in '78. Incidentally, I started teaching at Howard University in International Studies, although I'm by no means an academic, but in a sense I was trying to impart to young people - I taught at the graduate level - some of the benefits of working overseas, trying to interest them in careers and also attempting to give some exposure, I guess you'd say, to development issues and development theory, economic theory, and the administration of economic assistance programs from many different vantage points. My experience, I think, on the whole in the U.S. Government was a very satisfactory one. It did progress. We were assigned to a number of countries, and the Peace Corps experience had a certain uniqueness to it. And I think during this process of working in the Philippines and elsewhere, I gained some insights, some appreciation for how governments in so-called developing countries functioned, some problems of countries that needed to be addressed, and what translates even back in the United States that while you have distinctions between people in terms of attainment, or in terms of well-being, that a viable situation doesn't exist where people don't have some hope for a better future. And I think that's true not only in terms of individual nations, but also nations vis-a-vis other nations. In other words, I think it's almost a moral imperative that countries that have prospered need ... in a sense, have an obligation to help those that are less fortunate, because in doing so they make their own futures that much more secure.

I'm trying to think if there are any other things that are worth mentioning. I don't think so.

Q: I have a few questions from this morning's session that I want to back up to that could just take a moment or so. This morning when we were talking about any problems you may have had in working as an ambassador, as a black ambassador, and you made the statement, you said something to the effect that there is such a thing as being with an organization such as the State Department and yet not being of it, or a part of the establishment, I guess, so to speak, in a sense. And could you talk a little more about that and the implications that would have for one being able to lead a meaningful existence in that setting, or being able to have a rewarding career in that kind of setting?

NELSON: Well, I think the distinction we have to make here is that while I was a part of the Foreign Service establishment, and the AID Agency Economic Assistance Program, it was within the parameters of the State Department, it is still in a sense an independent agency, in a quasi sense. And certainly a total U.S. effort in any country and where the economic assistance programs are part of that effort is nominally under the direction of the ambassador; the AID director serves as part of the so-called country team. But the AID director has separate linkages back to Washington to his own administration, and, in a sense, to his own agency.

The State Department proper is, of course, populated by Foreign Service Officers, Foreign Service Officers, who take a written examination, who take an oral examination. There's a board of examiners. I was an examiner, for example, for the State Department, administering with others oral examinations for candidates for the Foreign Service. But the two services in a sense are separate. AID employees or Peace Corps employees are not FSO's, or Foreign Service Officers. They're Foreign Service Reserve Officers, and they haven't gone through the particular process that the Foreign Service Officers have gone through in the manner of entry into the Service. AID employees in a sense are selected on the basis of particular skills - agriculture, health or economics, programmers or whatever the case may be. Some enter through the JMA or what used to be the JMA examination or through an examination of their credentials through the filing of what used to be a Form 57, which lays out your experience, your education and salary and so forth and so on.

So while they operate in the same country, AID persons or Peace Corps staffers are in a sense adjuncts to the Foreign Service establishment but not really part of it as the Foreign Service Officer, we'll say, conceives it. It's unusual for persons who serve in other programs such as the Economic Assistance Program or the Peace Corps Program to achieve ambassadorial status. This is an avenue which is open to Foreign Service Officers in a sense by right, in fact, or to persons who contribute to political campaigns or whatever the case might be. You have to be a very wealthy man to be ambassador to the United Kingdom, for example, because the salary just doesn't carry the expenses which accrue to that position.

I think we can also say, as I said this morning, that the Foreign Service cadre is or has been in the past predominantly coming from your Ivy League schools. It's prestigious in a promotional sense or in an advancement sense; going through the ranks in the Foreign Service is rather a slow process. In the AID Agency you move fast, for example, because you're utilizing persons who bring expertise to the organization, generally speaking. AID persons are much advanced in grading as over Foreign Service persons, and I think there is some resentment of this. And we work differently. AID persons work with the particular government or host government. They work in administrative departments, they work in bureaus, they advise, and so on, and they carry out programs and they have resources. For example, a program I have administered had \$30 million in new obligations in a year. The embassy doesn't have those resources, and the embassy Foreign Service Officers are observers and reporters, but they're not persons who are in a sense directly involved with working shoulder to shoulder, side by side with officials of the country. So, we have different purposes. The Economic Assistance person is serving the U.S. interests, of course, but in a sense, he's serving the interests, or should be serving the interests of the host government as well, in terms of particular kinds of activities. If the government wants to develop a health system, he participates in an advisory capacity in establishing such a system. We bring over universities, we bring over contractual types of persons who work as functionaries in the real sense in that government. So therefore there is separation, yes; but the separation is blurred. The Foreign Service person, as an observer, as a reporter, the ambassador as a person who might wish to get a country to back a particular policy of the United States, the U.N., in terms of its foreign policy, might have a different kind of relationship, so that that's a difference.

There's a difference in terms of how quickly one, if he's lucky, I guess, goes up the scale of things. I started at grade 9, which is a secretaries grade really today. That's not demeaning secretaries but that's what it was. But I was able to get promoted two grades in six months, and that's unheard of in the Foreign Service, and by 1966 I was at the top of the Foreign Service scale, equivalent to a GS-18, and that's an ambassador's rank actually, in terms of salary, grade, whatever you might wish to call it. So when they make some ... this creates some difficulty, you see. I mean also the fact that you are more a part of the situation, of the environment in which you are functioning, is also a real difference.

But all that aside, I think historically the Foreign Service, as a part of the Civil Service apparatus of this government, has always been known as a prestigious service. Few are admitted, for example; it is exclusionary in a kind of way. Therefore, if you come from other ranks to a position of ambassador, which. I guess every Foreign Service Officer in his heart when he enters the Service wants - that's his goal - and you are an outsider in their terms and you come into this kind of situation, in a sense you're still an outsider. So it's like you're in the room, or in the institution, you're in the Department of State, but you can be in a particular room or situation and not be a part or an integral part, you see. I characterize it as the formal and the informal. You have access to the formal network because that's the way things run. I mean, you are who you are and you have that particular job. But in terms of the informal structure, because you are an outsider, there's where the difficulty arises. You're not a part of the network.

Q: But doesn't it make your job doubly difficult, because doesn't a great deal of substance get tied up in the informal network of what?

NELSON: It does.

Q: An awful lot of things get resolved in the informal network much easier than they would through the formal channels.

NELSON: I would say that was true, yes. At the same time, no one ... I can't say ... but the structure to which you relate formally wants to succeed, and those who people that structure want to succeed. You're part of the means by which they do succeed. Therefore, they would not, presumably, get in the way of your helping them to succeed by in a sense succeeding yourself.

Q: You say "presumably."

NELSON: Presumably, it's in the more subtle manifestations or characteristics where the informal network chews at you. No, I have always said you should surround yourself with the best people possible, because you're not successful on your own; you're successful through the success of your associates and the people that are working with you. I think the same thing would be true in the situation that is more characteristic of the way it functions in the formal sense. But the informal network operates possibly best in terms of assignments, posts, and things of this kind.

Q: Speaking of choosing your colleagues or the people who must work with you, when you went in as Ambassador to Botswana, to the other two countries, were you able to pick any of your staff or did you have to work with people who were already there as Foreign Service Officers?

NELSON: In Botswana I relieved the person who was there ... who preceded me, who was charged and who left shortly after I got there. He was using in a sense back channels to achieve that, because I think in a real sense he was the person who I would say was non-accepting. So I did have possibilities to approve people, and one person was recommended and I turned that person down, which did not sit well with the Department and they recommended someone else. And as time went on you got new staff in and you always have to give your concurrence.

Q: How much freedom do you have to turn someone down if you feel it's someone you can't work with?

NELSON: There are limits. There are limits to that because you can't... I guess this is where a formal network comes into play. If you don't know these persons, you have to work with these persons and, therefore, they are recommending people to you, nominating people that you have no means, real means of ascertaining whether these are the kinds of persons you might wish to work with or not, since you're not really a part of that organization, and that is a difficulty. I think I was fortunate in the main in that people that I've worked with in the various embassies were good people.

Q: In all three countries, then, did you ... you had totally different staffs working for you, the Foreign Service Officers, this elite group?

NELSON: Right.

Q: Were there any members of those staffs that you asked to have transferred possibly because they may not have been as accepting of you, possibly? You said this was a very elite group. Were there many blacks in the group? In 1971, if these were very elite groups of people, how accepting were they of a black ambassador who was in fact sitting in the spot all of them wanted (laugh), I imagine?

NELSON: Some were more accepting than others. There were no other blacks actually and ... let me think about that for a moment ... that's not exactly true. Well, a Foreign Service Officer lives and dies by the efficiency rating and you do rate them. And even though you're not a member of the tribe ...

Q: That rating stands.

NELSON: The rating stands. And I don't say that ratings should be used in a punitive way, but they recognize that their performance ... and there are ways to look at a rating to see whether it's subjective or objective ... it's an integrated whole ... whether it's inconsistent or whatever the case might be. And it's also true that at this time in '71 and '72 that the Foreign Service wives were saying that they weren't going to bake cookies and some of them were saying that they weren't going to do the things that ... this was the beginning of the independence era and there's nothing wrong with that. But it is also true that when they're functioning in another country, that the relationship was not only their own relationship but the relationship of the family as well. And if the wife doesn't adjust to the situation, and if the children don't adjust, that it certainly detracts from the principal's performance and could have a negative effect in the country itself, on the people of the country and so on. Therefore, while you may not be able to ask Mrs. X or Mrs. Y to have a dinner party or whatever the case might be, you still have to say whether the officer carries out his obligations; his obligations are social as well as functional. In other words, it's the whole, an entity, and this means, of course, that if the wife doesn't participate, doesn't function, that this detracts from the principal's functioning because a lot of your work is done in a social environment. And it's not always in someone else's home or whatever; it has to be in your home as well and failure to participate then detracts.

One correction I think is the Foreign Service isn't elitist elite. A lot of the persons who are part of it don't necessarily measure up to that standard. So your ability to evaluate the performance of the officers with whom you are associated is an important aspect of your job because I don't know if it's still the rule, but negative ratings or rankings ... all Foreign Service Officers are in a sense in the same class ... and vertical structure like economic officers or political officers and so forth are evaluated worldwide against each other on the basis of their written ratings. And then promotion is given to those in the various classes who are at the top, and it used to be that if you were passed over for so many years you were in a sense rejected from the Service. So that feature was helpful and the fact that it is there is helpful, but at the same time there, it has to be done on an objective basis, not a subjective basis because it can be very damaging to someone's career.

Q: Being an ambassador to one country is, I would think, an extremely demanding job. You had three countries. How did you ... it must have been very stressful at times. How did you manage to cope? Any special hobbies? Did you feel that your management style as such helped?

NELSON: Sometimes it helped to hit a lot of golf balls, actually. You can take out your, oh, your feelings and frustrations in that way. You can take out some of them. No, I would agree with you, being ambassador to one country is certainly enough because you can never know enough ... you can never have sufficient knowledge of your situation, and in terms of how to deal with that situation and all the various things that go on.

I think, you know, that you work seven days a week, and some people say you work 24 hours a day, but that's not the case. But it's very important to have good associates, productive associates, associates who bring something to the table, rather than be just recipients. It is a kind of wearing existence because when do you relax, and people, you know, talk about the cocktail circuit and all that, but that too is work. And in a kind of way, I guess you'd say that you're always on your guard. And even in your home, you have people that you have to have, for instance, people who work for you, and they're observing you as well as everyone else. So this possibly can be exaggerated, but at the same time I think it's very real that you are under an almost constant scrutiny. Fortunately, however, every two years or every ... once in a two-year period assignment you do get something called R&R - rest and rehabilitation, or something, and you get a chance to go off to some R&R post. For example, when we were in southern Africa we went to the Seychelles in Mauritius, which permits you to get out of the environment and have a little fun.

Q: How long did that period last?

NELSON: Oh, about 30 days, 30 calendar days I think. So that's helpful. And of course, every two years you do ... ambassadors don't get home leave but in the AID agency when ... everyone except the ambassador gets something called home leave which is ... which permits you to get back to the United States for about 60 to 90 days, where you live out of suitcases and travel from relative to relative, actually. That's not true (laughter), but it serves another purpose, too, and that is that part of this business is keeping up contacts and acquaintances and so forth and so on, and letting people know that you're around and what you're interested in and so on. I remember when I was in Tanzania, John Hannah, who I mentioned previously, came there with Mrs. Hannah and we took a trip around Tanzania, by air, primarily to see some of the things that we were doing in the country. And it was at that time that I was up, I think, for reassignment, or I was coming up for reassignment. I'd been in Tanzania for almost three years and I'd been in correspondence with the head of the African Bureau and they were saying that no, I shouldn't come on home leave because there might be someone who was politically, you know ... or had some political strings who could come in and take your post. So even though I call myself in AID terms a career person, I was not recruited because I was a Democrat or Republican or whatever the case might be. But when you get ... when you're a director or deputy director you're in a so-called exempt position and this calls for various clearances and so on ... White House clearances, etc. And the idea was that maybe at that particular moment - I don't know - but this sometimes happens that when they send up the name to be assigned as a director or reassigned as a director to post X out of the AID system, that someone in the White House might say we have an obligation to John Smith over here, and we'll put John Smith in this position. What you then do is that you revert back to your (laughter) old status.

So this was actually transpiring, and I remember John Hannah sitting down in our living room in Dar es Salaam and he said, "Don't you worry. Actually, this is not the end of your assignment." He was the head of the ... administrator or the head of the agency, of the Economic Assistance Program. Because he was briefed before he came out about the question of reassignment or ongoing forward assignment that had to arise, so he said, "Don't you worry, things are okay here until the summer."

So I would imagine, conjecture, pure and simple, that his visit and - he stayed in our home - and traveling about together. We went to see President Nyerere and a number of other things - this played a role, because it was from Tanzania that I left to ... the post of ambassador and of course, he had to agree. I'm sure he did quite well. It's my conjecture but I'm sure he had a role. He also visited us and stayed with us in Botswana and we had again an opportunity to take him about and to call on ministers and other persons in government. He was a very fine man actually, and gave me lots of good advice on the ... some of which maybe I wasn't as good in following as need be. That's when I ... when this person came out from Washington when I was in this meeting in Addis Ababa and called me out at the first coffee break and told me this and said you cannot turn it down, that I was somewhat taken aback, that how could this happen in this kind of situation when in this other situation people were expressing anxieties that you weren't going to be reappointed to your post, that politically there might be someone else coming into it? I don't know how I got into that, but anyhow (laughter) ...

Q: I'm glad you did.

NELSON: For any person working along in government, there's a great deal you can plan from A to Z, but a lot of it is really luck, I suppose, and the manner in which you do your job. This took place in Tanzania, but I remember there was a delegation. Some group came out from the United States. You know teachers go on trips and take this off their taxes, well, orientation trips or something like that. But the function was one that the ambassador carries out sometimes when such groups do come through a country, you have to give a reception for them or something like that. And I remember being at that sort of party - out in the garden - and I was talking to a Tanzanian and one of these visitors came over and wanted to know what do you do, are you with the Embassy? And I said no, I am with the Assistance Mission here, and the Tanzanian in effect said what is meaningful to us in Tanzania is the economic assistance program. The Embassy doesn't really make any difference (laughter) ... It is no matter, actually.

Q: Were there any Tanzanian officials from the Embassy nearby?

NELSON: No, no. But this is the other side of it in the sense that not that you're buying ... you can't buy a country ... and you wouldn't have a country that you could buy anyhow, and you're not buying people because people who can be bought aren't worth whatever it takes, but it speaks to the relationship between persons who are involved with economic assistance programs vis-a-vis officials of the host government, because you're functioning together and over against the other side which takes but in a sense doesn't give. And it varies from place to place and from time to time and from person to person, like if I am sitting here with ... and this isn't exact ... let's say I'm sitting here with the ability to fund a program, if we can come to an agreement and so forth and so on, and this means, of course, within the U.S. policy, etc., etc. And that has, I guess, a different coloration to one's presence. The other fellow is sitting over there and he's trying to get something or get them to, you know, to deal in a certain kind of ... commercial way with the United States. And that's also another kind of coloration, and I think it's ... my sense is that there is some kind of feeling - that's a neutral word - feeling on an individual's part because he is not in that ... he or she is not in that particular position. That's not too obscure, I hope (laughter).

Q: A little. Would you like to break it down a bit?

NELSON: Well, okay, this is the situation. For example, a government that I worked with wanted to undertake a particular program and wanted to get a particular institution involved. We funded that program and we got the request and did the proposals and so on, so on and so on, fought it out with Washington and got that program approved and that program was of the magnitude ... that particular segment of the total program was in the magnitude of about \$15 million, we'll say.

Q: This was an AID program?

NELSON: That particular segment of a total program would cost about \$15 million over a period of a few years. That does something in terms of how you interact with the government in that your presence and, in a sense, your working together results in tangible assets flowing - even though these might be borrowed funds or grant funds or whatever the case might be - and these tangible assets permit a government, or permit a government to carry out an activity which has as its purpose benefiting people, increasing the economic well-being of the country as a whole, and of course, it has a political quotient in that if it serves people's needs, it then is a reflection, a positive reflection on that particular administration. Okay, that gives a different aura to the individual or to the organization or to the people who are working in concert to bring this about because the government realizes that they are influencing you by their actions, you are accepting their modifications when you broker out the situation and activity and then you are in a sense your own representative and their representative in Washington to get this activity through the powers that be. And if it's successful - something tangible happens which does all of these things, or presumably should do all of these things.

The other fellow sitting over there - we're in economic programs, economic section of the embassy, for example - he's interested in the economy but he's interested in the economy from a reporting standpoint and you report economically as well from the economic assistance side. And they don't necessarily coincide with our views, but he's sitting over there dredging out information and so forth and so on. But his activity results in no tangible asset to the government. I'm not saying we're buying people or anything like that, but this is part of what you are and what you do and so on and so on. What resources are behind you, and that sometimes doesn't sit too well. And I've been in situations where the embassy, let's say, might encourage a particular undertaking and we would have to come along and discourage it. And that really shouldn't be because before overt steps are taken, you know, there should be some kind of consultation that takes place. That's what happens in the best of all worlds and sometimes it doesn't happen and so that specificity would be lacking. (Laughter).

Q: You did say you could take it out later if you wanted (laughter).the more you can say now remember historians years later will want as much specificity as you can possibly spare.

NELSON: I became ill in Kenya, actually, and I came back to the United States and had surgery and I was away for quite some time. Now that gives you a geographical fix, doesn't it? But someone had said, we will do "X", okay? And therefore we explored the feasibility of it, and it cost us money to explore the feasibility of it. Not immense sums, but money. It was not feasible, it was not. Therefore, we didn't do it. Well, maybe commitments had been made; I don't know. But that didn't sit very well.

Q: Because you didn't do it?

NELSON: Yes, because it was not a feasible undertaking. It was a small thing, but here was a situation where here in a sense they got out in front without being certain of the ground that they were traveling over. My problem, I guess, for example, you talk about getting people ... and this gives you an idea of the difference. I knew I got the AID person that I wanted for southern Africa to be in charge of the AID program there. He had worked for me in Tanzania. I knew he was a good worker, intelligent, and all that. My problem was even though I carried the auxiliary title of economic coordinator for the area was - in a kind of way - to let him do his job. The natural predilection on my part having come from the Economic Assistant Program and having worked together in a mission in Tanzania, would be in a sense to ... and where he had been the program officer - was in a sense to continue that type relationship. But actually he was not the program officer; he was the director of the AID program and as a director of that AID program, he in a sense was in charge of it. I wasn't in charge of it in terms of implementation.

So I think two things are that one, you have to know what your role is and you have to know what the other person's role is. And you have to let that person perform in his role as long as that performance is in keeping with our overall policy and so forth, and second is that I knew the personalities in the AID program, and therefore I was able to reach out and get the person that I wanted and I didn't have any problems with Washington on that score. But in terms of looking into the barrel of the State Department, it's like people anonymous when you come from the outside, and that's one of the difficulties that you have.

Well, in a sense this has been more economic assistance than State Department per se. I also think that I have been in every agency that was represented in the three countries, with the exception of the cultural and USIS program. Therefore, I had a background in the Peace Corps; I had a background in AID; and I was functioning as a State Department person. And, of course, you know all these persons are in a sense entities and representatives of the so-called country team, and I do believe that it enabled me to function with possibly greater effect and greater understanding. When I was up for my confirmation hearings, Senator Fulbright was chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee in the Senate. And, of course, they have your background and you have to tell them, you have to recite your experience and so forth and so on. And I was coming from the AID program to which he said in effect the State Department was being smart or something like that. I didn't know Fulbright at all, and he was most famous ... very influential in the foreign affairs community, foreign relations community and had deep understanding of it, said it was a very positive thing for the State Department to have someone from AID go into this kind of position.

Q: If you had the opportunity to come out of retirement and take on another post as ambassador, would you be interested in doing so?

NELSON: I don't know. It would have to be very, very attractive in the sense of a country that I felt some real affinity for....

Q: Like?

NELSON: I don't know. You never return to the scene in a kind of way. All the countries in which ... where I have been associated have been rewarding, and some of them more rewarding than others, and rewarding in different ways. But I would be interested in a country where there wasn't ... a country that wasn't too large. I'd be interested if this opportunity ... this theoretical opportunity came to pass; a country that wasn't too large, a country which had an approach to an economic and political future that I could be accepting of, I guess. I'm not looking for something that would be easy, but a country where we felt there was an opportunity to be of positive or ... positive, to have a positive impact. Before I went to Tanzania I read a great deal about Tanzania's President Nyerere, the leadership that he has put forth in Africa. And as a part of the process of orientation that you go through and before you go out to these countries, you go through New York and you spend time with concerns that have an interest in them. I think almost you spend about 4 or 5 days doing this in New York City and almost without exception the person that I had contact with in New York had sort of sympathized or extended their condolences to me for the fact that I was going to Tanzania, a Socialist country, and actually in their terms, a Communist country. And that was the image in a sense that they had and the impressions that they were giving me. Some of that was current in the U.S. Government establishment as well.

Well, let's put it this way, Tanzania was one of the most rewarding work experiences that I've ever had, one of the most rewarding. True, Tanzania is in very difficult straits economically. It's been buffeted by poor weather in terms of agriculture and all the rest of it the last few years. And it is trying to establish a system which is truly theirs, truly Tanzanian; flows from tradition and culture and all the rest of it. And it isn't free enterprise in the sense of actions and some other things you might say, but while at the same time we have the prerogative of helping or not helping the country, equally so the country has the prerogative ... the people of the country really, to structure its system in a sense that it sees fit and certainly the thing is that they have been working hard to bring real vitality to their society and to their country, and they were trying to do it in a way in which ... with egalitarianism where you didn't have wide disparities between people in terms of their well-being, their hopes and so on. It's egalitarianism. And that's what they want. I don't see anything wrong with it. And after all it's theirs to do with as they see fit in a sense.

But there are so many misconceptions, I think, about governments and about people which every now and then have currency in the United States, and that certainly was true of Tanzania. Because if you look at any country in Africa and you look at our own development and you look at developments that take place in Europe or whatever, and the history is very, very short, very, very short history. The progress isn't a straight line. So in thinking or speaking or talking about a country where one might wish to go, there's always that question whether it is something which is a mirror image of our system or what. What you really want, I guess, is to go to a place where a government is dedicated to enhancing its independence by bringing benefits to all its people, or something like that. I doubt that at my mature years, and soon (laughter), this can come to pass.

Q: (laughter - unintelligible). You think young, Mr. Ambassador, in this interview. You can't say that. When we started this session you said there might be a few things you'd like to add about those years in Botswana, Swaziland and Lesotho.

NELSON: Yes, I think naturally so in my remarks I gravitated more ... laid stress on, or however you might wish to characterize it, on the Botswanan experience. I'm not trying to wish that away or take that back, but I think it also should be said that I think this is natural in the sense that Botswana is where I spent the preponderance of my time. But then putting that aside, these countries are generally referred to as the BLS, as you probably know.

Q: No.

NELSON: Botswana, Lesotho, and Swaziland are all grouped together as the BLS countries because of that character that they had their independence and they were black-ruled, and they have multiracial societies. But while in my comments, as I say, more stress has been laid on Botswana, it should also be said that the countries are different. They have certain things in common and that's more geographical than anything else. But each in its own right and in its own way is attempting to do in a real sense the same thing. They go about it differently, under different systems, under different leadership, and with different potential. In some respects, Lesotho, we'll say, is less fortunate than Swaziland, and maybe, I don't know whether it's exact or not, maybe Swaziland may be less fortunate than Botswana when one speaks of endowment, but the critical question is how effectively are they using their resources as well as other resources that might flow to them to give meaning to their independence. And I think here that there is little if any difference. Some may be more successful than others. Some may be approaching it ... approaching the task of bringing real meaning to nationhood differently, but I think the goal or goals would be generally similar in each of the countries. And this again is the fact that they are different and therefore different systems, different cultures, different traditions, and different ways of going at a particular objective. I wouldn't want anything that I say to in a sense infer that this was not the case. I think it's also true that relating almost naturally or in a subconscious kind of way to that which is more similar which strikes me, of course, with our own apperception that which you are most knowledgeable about, or familiar with, that which seems to run more or less concurrently with our own views, own views, I suppose; not views, but experiences. So the stress is that they are different. They exist in different circumstances and this covers a whole range of things. But despite that, I would have to say, I think, with real conviction that they are attempting to give real substance to their independence. It should also be stated that the countries were not in a sense colonies like Kenya or some of the other African countries; they were trusteeships, and some people say historically that the metropole did not relate too effectively to them in their dependency status because it was assumed that at some point in time they might flow into or be submerged within the Republic of South Africa, what we know as the Republic of South Africa. Therefore, there is very limited investment of whatever kind in these countries to combat that. Botswana, I think, had very, very few high school graduates when it came into being. They've also had leaders, a significant number of leaders who received the training that they did at Fort Hare in South Africa, for example. Lesotho, and this is apparent today because of its literacy, and interestingly enough, looking at the population as a whole, women have higher attainment in literacy than the men do, but also they have Pope Pius XII University there which, I said before became BLS until BLS was broken up. But they're all doing it. Like Frank Sinatra says, they're doing it their way (laughter).

So, you know, you talk about what you know best but at the same time it's not a slight to the other two.

Q: And you did spend ever so much more time, there, in a sense home base.

NELSON: That's true...

Q:it's understandable. I think that just about covers the questions that I wanted to pose.

NELSON: Okay.

Q: If you do not have other things you want to add at this time, maybe we can bring this session to a close.

NELSON: Okay, I can't really think of anything additional there that I could add. I don't know who the audience will be for these tapes, but..

Q: There will be no audience until you have approved...

NELSON: No, I was thinking about ... you know, the question about young people and so on. I think we have covered that. The only thing I can say is that in final terms I suppose that working abroad, or working in the Foreign Service, or whatever it may be, is a very rewarding way to spend one's life because I firmly believe that this is a world of interdependency - which has almost become a cliché½ now - but I think it's very true, and we need to have more people in our society that recognize this and in a sense recognize the benefits that flow from a positive and a contributing relationship to the so-called developing world. And participation in this environment, at whatever level, increases one's own appreciation and I think that while you make a contribution ...we seek to make a contribution - that in many, many insidious, non-tangible ways or non-apparent ways, you're a much better person, a much more fulfilled person because of this kind of experience. In other words, you are a receiver of goods as well as a contributor. (Laughter).

Q: On behalf of the Phelps-Stokes Fund, thank you for participating in the program. It's meant a great deal to us to have you agree to work with us on it.

NELSON: It's my pleasure and may it be worthwhile.

Q: And it's been an honor interviewing you.

NELSON: Thank you.

Q: Thank you.

Addendum: (The question was again raised by the interviewer about any difficulties he may have experienced in traveling to and from his posts having to pass through white South Africa).

NELSON: Well, the question is in a sense how ... what was the effect of having to travel to and through South Africa. When I went into South Africa by air, by some means I usually notified the Embassy in Pretoria that I was coming. I was always met by protocol, South African protocol, and you were taken to a VIP room so that you didn't in a sense mingle with people. When we arrived in South Africa ... this was before they had the new international airport which presumably doesn't have any signs for blacks or whites or coloreds, in their terms, again we were taken to the VIP room. In a sense you're isolated.

Driving across the country you were always not apprehensive but in a sense alert and, you know, the common things ... you had to take our lunch, I had to take my lunch with the driver. If you went to a filling station, could you use the facilities? We would drive up to get gas and people would ask the driver: "Who is that?" One time a car got a little rambunctious with us and fortunately or unfortunately ... fortunately, I have to say, the South African road patrol was there and they stopped the car and they also stopped us and they asked our driver if that person cut in front of us causing us to brake suddenly. Of course, we said yes, and he waved us on.

Another time we were going down the road and there was a policeman on foot ... I guess he had a car but he stopped us. He came up to the car and said, "Left-hand drive." Then he told us to proceed on. There was not too much harassment, however. I remember once I traveled with the Nigerian Ambassador to our High Commissioner to Lesotho for Lesotho Independence Day. He was in my car and we were going through South African customs immediately upon leaving Botswana, and the customs person made some remark about the leader of his country, I think it was General Gowan at that time, and it wasn't a very pleasant occurrence. Another thing is ... which makes you realize that you're never too far out of sight.

I'd been on a field trip with my consular officer, and had been gone for about four or five days, and had gone all the way down to Bokspits, which is a very interesting place in itself. It's where caracal (fur) comes from and the people of Bokspits all have South African names and so forth and so on. They're supposedly Hottentot and other mixtures, and actually their language is Afrikaans. But we were coming back and we were stopping, we stopped to have something done to the car in this town ... small town, just over the border from Botswana, and we were walking down the street and a person came up and said to my consular officer: "We have made arrangements at the border post for you to go through." Now he didn't know me, he didn't know the consular officer, but they knew who we were. In other words, they had their eyes on you.

Q: They probably followed you, in a sense, the entire time you were traveling in the area.

NELSON: Although we had been in Botswana, but we had to come out of Botswana to go by road to go back into Botswana, so we were just crossing a small portion of South Africa, but they knew we were there. And I couldn't walk up to someone in the middle of the street here in Washington and say ... or identify them if I'd never seen them before or anything like that, but they were able to do that. So they are conscious , but I can say that we stayed in a hotel and we did things, went to restaurants in Capetown and so on with other Embassy people. But I'm sure that when you appeared on the scene ... the way had been prepared. So they were very guarded in a sense that no untoward occurrence take place. And none did (laughter).

Q: I have another question. During your stay there, were there any major incidents between the people ... between your countries and South Africa?

NELSON: Not that I could really call major. There is a place in Botswana, for example, Francistown, which is a rail center. And during this period, of course, there were people coming into Botswana and some of the other countries in a refugee-type situation, that was greatly accelerated subsequently. We did have some persons from South Africa in a sense escaping through Botswana. There were some situations in Lesotho which I cannot recall too specifically at this point in time, but as a generalization, I would say that the relationships between the various countries were correct. One of the things which we all ... not we all but some of us deplored were the hotels. When you had meager resources you tried to gain from what you can, and, of course, in South Africa there are no casinos and there are no, I've forgotten, R-type movies, and things of this kind. So each of these hotels had a casino and the South Africans would really flow over the borders to frequent them and buy the Playboy magazines and all this kind of thing, because, you know, the oppressiveness of that society, although I don't think Playboy is a criterion for such a thing. But anyhow ... and, of course, they had these casinos and the nightclub atmosphere had an influence, societal influence ... young ladies and all the rest of it, you know, in South Africa ... which was not positive. And some of the governments excluded their own nationals. One government did exclude its nationals from participating in the casinos, for example. I know those of us who were in the various diplomatic missions didn't look askance at this, but we in a sense deplored it because here were people from South Africa coming into their countries to carry on, we'll say, which in a way they couldn't in their own country, but it didn't demonstrate any sense of respect for these countries, although they needed the hotels but they didn't need the gambling and the kinds of elements which this kind of facility attracted.

In a government sense, the relationships were correct and I think that's probably the best characterization. Certainly they weren't warm, but correct. Oh, I would say, too, that other than the fact that these casinos are resource generators, they wouldn't have been there.

Q: When you left, were they still there?

NELSON: I'm sure they're still there. Although in one of the bantustans now or one of the so-called independent African nations within the nation ... within the Republic of South Africa where Frank Sinatra just appeared, they do have a casino and all that, so maybe they don't have to travel to Lesotho or Botswana or Swaziland for this purpose (laughter), you know.

Q: Thank you, Ambassador Nelson.

End of interview